

(Washington, DC)- Congresswoman Gwen Moore (D-WI) introduced the Safe Housing Identity Exemption for the Lives of Domestic Violence Victims (SHIELD) Act today in the U.S. House of Representatives. This bill, co-sponsored by Congresswoman Katherine Harris (R-FL), would ensure that victims of domestic violence who have fled their abuser could not then be tracked and found through the Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) new Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

Currently, all domestic violence shelters, transitional housing programs, homeless and emergency shelters receiving funds from the HUD McKinney-Vento Act are required to submit the names and other personal information of all who use the facility into the HMIS tracking database. Employees and contractors of federal, state, and local agencies-some of whom may be abusers-have access to the HMIS database.

"The purpose of these shelters is to provide a safe place where people in need can be assured protection and support. Under the current HUD rules, the identities of hundreds of thousands will be exposed, making it possible for those who wish to hurt or even kill them to discover their whereabouts." Congresswoman Moore said. "The SHIELD Act will make certain that the anonymity of victims of domestic violence remains secure."

The SHIELD Act would exempt shelters receiving funds from the HUD McKinney-Vento Act from having to submit personal information-such as first and last name, Social Security number, date of birth, ethnicity and race-about each person who seeks safety and shelter at their facility. Instead of offering such specific information, the SHIELD Act recommends using non-personal identifying information for data collection. This would still allow HUD to perform unduplicated counts and statistical analysis of those benefiting from its services in order to measure the effectiveness of McKinney-Vento Act programs.

Thirty-seven states have confidentiality laws that conflict with the requirement that shelters contribute information about those who use their services to the HMIS database, including Wisconsin. HUD initially considered exempting domestic violence victims in 2003, then reversed its position and removed the domestic violence exemption from the final HMIS standards released in 2004.

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